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SUBJECT: PRT/TARIN KOWT: GOVERNOR MONIB'S TENUOUS GRASP ON
URUZGAN PROVINCE

REF: KABUL 1211

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RONALD NEUMANN FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) The security situation in Afghanistan's Uruzgan province remains acute seven weeks after the arrival of a new governor. Unhelpful interference by the previous governor, stepped up Taliban activity, and police forces operating outside governmental authority impede Governor Monib's ability to establish control. Monib faces an uphill battle in winning support from Uruzgan's competing tribes, some of which seek to undermine him in their jockeying for dominance.

Unable to call upon his security forces or tribal allies, Monib has limited options and relies heavily on his new NDS chief and coalition forces. In the past, Taliban activities were generally confined to remote areas of Uruzgan, but recently the insurgents have begun operating in larger towns, perhaps even Tarin Kowt. Monib's near-term burden will become heavier now that Gizab district (formerly part of Dai-Kundi province) is part of Uruzgan, unless the plan includes a permanent security presence in Gizab. Ambassador Neumann is pressing, and will continue to press President Karzai to support Monib and keep the former Governor under control.

¶2. (C) Over the next few weeks, a range of Coalition and Afghan National Army (ANA) operations coupled with Afghan National Police (ANP) activity will begin, and will continue for several months. These operations, including Operation Mountain Thrust, should significantly diminish insurgent

activity in Uruzgan and with it national and provincial government anxiety about security in the south. CFC military operations will be coupled with immediate follow-on reconstruction and development projects, which CFC and Embassy believe are the critical factors leading to longer-term stability in volatile provinces such as Uruzgan. These measures are laid out in paragraphs 11-12 below. Delays in funding Afghan Police reform and a lack of available reconstruction resources for Afghanistan, however, could weaken the overall effect we can achieve in Uruzgan. END SUMMARY.

NEW GOVERNOR HAS NOT CONSOLIDATED HIS AUTHORITY

¶3. (C) Abdul Hakim Monib took office as governor of Uruzgan province in southern Afghanistan on March 18 (reftel), and has impressed us with his competence and administrative skills. But Monib is an outsider who lacks a local power base. He has been courting leaders of Uruzgan's major tribes seeking allies to secure his legitimacy, but they are looking for patronage in return. It appears that some of the power tribes (Populzai and Barakzai) are working to undermine him, and that he may not be getting much support from Kabul.

THE POPULZAI - A DESTABILIZING FORCE

¶4. (S) The Populzai--tribe of President Karzai and former Governor Jan Mohammed--appeared to cooperate with Monib in his first few weeks, as Jan Mohammed orchestrated a smooth transfer to the new governor. In recent days, we have heard from three independent sources that Jan Mohammed, now living in Kabul but with occasional trips to Uruzgan and Kandahar,

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is actively stirring unrest in the region of Tarin Kowt, the provincial capital. The Populzai are strongest in Tarin Kowt and its surrounding villages, extending into southern Deh-Rawod and Chora districts to the west and east. We believe that Jan Mohammed is urging his tribal supporters to finish harvesting the current poppy crop and then move toward Tarin Kowt to cause trouble for coalition forces and the provincial government. He reportedly is in indirect contact with Taliban elements in order to coordinate activities. The goal is to demonstrate that Governor Monib is unable to govern Uruzgan, in the hope that Karzai will reinstate Jan Mohammed as governor or appoint him to an ad hoc position such as security chief. Jan Mohammed reportedly retains substantial influence with some in Karzai's inner circle, lubricated with poppy profits. While the Populzai are not Taliban supporters (and have been fierce Taliban opponents in the past) they certainly have the contacts with the local Taliban structures to forge an alliance of convenience, as well as the resources to generate instability on their own. Ambassador Neumann has raised with President Karzai, and separately with NSA Rassoul, the need to control Jan Mohammed. Karzai has great (and we believe excessive) trust in Jan Mohammed. We will keep after this from Kabul.

¶5. (S) Governor Monib once confided to us that Afghan Highway Police (AHP) Chief Col. Matiollah was the only local leader whom he trusted, but that trust is slipping. Matiollah--cousin to Jan Mohammed--is a fighter with a reputation for cruelty and bravery. The 300-strong Highway Police force is essentially his semi-reintegrated militia unit, dominated by his Populzai kin. While the AHP are not effective at patrolling Uruzgan's roads, they are seasoned anti-Taliban fighters. The Governor's suspicions of Matiollah were kindled not only by reports of Jan Mohammed's fomenting opposition to his government, but also by events surrounding a firefight that Australian Special Forces had with insurgents in the Baluci Pass, seven miles north of Tarin Kowt, on 30 April. This was part of a series of incidents marking the Taliban's intent to move closer to, and into, Tarin Kowt. Matiollah and his AHP responded in support of the Aussies, but the next day Matiollah had contradictory stories and Gov. Monib realized that he had fabricated some

events. Monib told us on May 3 that he still needs Matiollah but no longer trusts him fully.

BARAKZAI MAY BE WORKING AGAINST COALITION

16. (C) Monib has even greater misgivings about the loyalties of Rozi Khan, Chief of the ANP police force. In early March, before Monib took office, Rozi Khan spoke frequently with Monib by telephone and formed what appeared to be a mutually-beneficial alliance. Khan is a leader of the large Barakzai tribe that was marginalized during the Populzai administration of Jan Mohammed. So an alliance with the new governor would both provide Governor Monib with a strong ally and elevate the Barakzai to a dominant position. That alliance is now in tatters. We are receiving increasingly credible reports that Rozi Khan is behind recent, specific attacks/threats to coalition forces. He no longer sends his ANP men to the PRT's MPAT training or to the Kandahar Regional Training Center, and his men no longer staff the Tarin Kowt checkpoint that they agreed to set up last month under the governor's new security plan. One source reports that Khan has but two dozen actual policemen, while he pockets the salaries of the other 300 that he is allotted.

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Monib now sends Rozi Khan out of the room before discussing sensitive topics. At this point, Rozi Khan and the ANP are not truly under government control. We have heard that President Karzai is poised to dispatch 200 new ANP police under a new commander, Col. Qassam of Paktia, to replace Rozi Khan in the coming days. If true, this is welcome news. The Ambassador has pressed for and received assurances from the Minister of Interior that Rozi Khan will shortly be replaced. We will press hard to make these assurances a reality.

TALIBAN APPROACHING TARIN KOWT

17. (S) In the past, overt Taliban activities were generally confined to specific (and largely inaccessible) areas in Uruzgan: Caheh-Cineh district, Deh-Rawod district (particularly west of the Helmand River), the Mirabad Valley in Chora, etc. But in recent weeks the insurgents have become bolder, maneuvering in larger units, and operating in larger towns, including Chora and now Tarin Kowt. Coalition forces have been involved in a dozen combat actions in the past month on the road from Tarin Kowt to Chora, including a PRT convoy engaged in a brief firefight on April 14. The PRT escorted the new Chora District Chief to his job on April 9, part of Gov. Monib's effort to stabilize that area. While the new chief remains alive and on the job, he has only ten policemen and cannot confront the Taliban in the area. His survival may well be a result of his reaching an accommodation with the insurgents. Chora illustrates the dynamics behind the Taliban activity: partly a function of the annual spring campaign and partly rooted in local tribal conflicts exacerbated by the change in governor, the Taliban coerce local populations, winning if not enthusiastic support, then at least grudging blind-eye collaboration. Achieving this state of control in Chora has allowed the insurgents to stage southwards towards Tarin Kowt.

18. (S) The recent up-tick in insurgent activities near the Baluci Pass (the main chokepoint on the road from Tarin Kowt northward to Chora and Gizab districts) and the May 1 suicide vehicle (SVBIED) attack on a PRT convoy in Tarin Kowt demonstrated the Taliban's intent to operate in what was, until recently, Uruzgan's most secure area. The Governor's reaction to the SVBIED was aggressive but unworkable: he hoped to cordon off the entire town and conduct a house-by-house search for weapons, Taliban, and opium. But without the participation of the untrustworthy ANP or AHP, such an operation was not feasible. The Taliban have set up a network of operatives in the Tarin Kowt bazaar who provide advance warning of movements by coalition or Afghan security forces. Two mid-level Taliban commanders were arrested this week by NDS agents in the center of Tarin Kowt - though

President Karzai apparently called from Kabul and ordered the release of at least one, who was caught with a list of Taliban contacts. In addition, local officials who work with the PRT on reconstruction projects are receiving credible death threats, which suggests that if the security environment does not improve, the PRT's work may be impacted.

MONIB SEES THE PROBLEMS BUT NEEDS SUPPORT

¶9. (C) Unable to call on his security forces or tribal allies, Gov. Monib faces limited options. He has come to rely heavily on Abdul Rauf, his new NDS intelligence chief. Rauf arrived here from Kabul on April 23, replacing an

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incompetent predecessor. He is serious and an outsider like the Governor and has become Monib's consigliere. Rauf is overseeing the expansion and improvement in the NDS unit here. Monib even hopes to tackle Uruzgan's enormous opium problem. This week he ordered farmers cultivating lush poppy fields just outside his governor's compound to remove their crops within three days, and he is setting up a regular Poppy Coordination Meeting. At this point it appears that Monib is not involved in the poppy trade that was a key element of his predecessor's administration. Yet a Monib confidant told us Monib has received only USD 10,000 in funding from Kabul since taking office two months ago--a small fraction of Jan Mohammed's monthly budget. Monib is reportedly not making his payroll and is considering resigning if more funding is not forthcoming this month. The Embassy is taking this matter up with authorities in Kabul.

GIZAB DISTRICT TO URUZGAN

¶10. (S) President Karzai recently ordered that Gizab district, now a part of Dai-Kundi province on Uruzgan's northern border, be transferred to Uruzgan. This makes sense: Gizab is more Pashtun and less Hazara than the rest of Dai-Kundi, and it has become a supply route for insurgents entering Uruzgan from the north. But Uruzgan authorities are not able to stabilize their existing five districts, so the burden of a new, untamed district will weigh heavily on their resources. Establishing effective government in Gizab and cutting the Taliban lines there is key to securing the region, but merely making an administrative transfer of the district will not get the job done.

COMMENT

¶11. (S) Installing Governor Monib was a necessary, but not sufficient, measure for establishing security in Uruzgan. Other key components necessary to meet this objective include the provision by the GOA of strong resource and human capacity support to the province--for example, through the deployment there of effective GOA ministry representatives--especially critical in law enforcement, e.g., Provincial and Highway Police chiefs. The Afghan Government is already taking several steps to enhance security in the province:

-- Law enforcement: Currently, a major re-distribution of Afghan National Police Forces is underway that will move large numbers of police to the south, including to Uruzgan (see Kabul 2154). The Interior Ministry is also planning to move a stand-by police battalion to RC-South and to transfer Highway Police personnel to Uniformed Police in Uruzgan and elsewhere in RC South;

-- Military Operations: The ANA is exploring the idea of adding Forward Operating Bases in Uruzgan Province based on how they support the overall security challenge in RC South. An ANA battalion is currently deployed over several locations in Uruzgan.

¶12. (S) Vigorous Coalition and NATO/ISAF activity in

Uruzgan will significantly reinforce GOA and the Governor's efforts to stabilize the province:

--A Dutch Maneuver Battalion is currently deploying into Uruzgan Province with 12 helicopters. Ground forces will

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total up to 1400, supplemented by an additional 240 Australian troops to support the Dutch PRT (the Dutch will assume command from the U.S. in late July). Australia currently deploys 179 Special Forces troops in Uruzgan. The Dutch PRT Commander will have 500,000 to 1 million euros available for immediate ("CIMIC") economic assistance, and will have access to some portion of between 5-10 million euros in EU funding that must meet stricter criteria for implementation.

-- Coalition/ANA Operation Mountain Thrust will begin in mid-May and continue into July. During that period, it will feature a major infusion of military force into Uruzgan and the central regions of Helmand and Kandahar Provinces. Forces will include the ANA 205th CORPS, Afghan National Police, Afghan Border Police, Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force, and Coalition forces. The operation will concentrate on traditional Taliban sanctuary areas in Uruzgan and Northern Helmand and border interdiction operations on key Taliban infiltration routes into RC-South. With Mountain Thrust's conclusion in mid-July, Civil-Military operations will continue in support of infrastructure improvement and humanitarian assistance projects targeted on immediate and longer-term quality of life improvements.

-- Coalition Special Operations Forces (CSOF) will conduct joint missions with the Afghan National Army (ANA) to degrade and defeat the Taliban in Uruzgan Province. CSOF forces are currently training ANA units in combat operations. These forces will be used in Mountain Thrust and will also support a long-term presence for Afghan National Security Forces in Uruzgan and elsewhere in the south.

¶13. (C) This combination of Afghan and international resources should enhance the Governor's ability to get on with the business of building a stable province marked by economic development and the rule of law. In the Ambassador's meeting with the Dutch Foreign Minister May 8 the latter committed the Dutch to work strongly in support of Monib. Standing up good governance from the shambles left by the previous Afghan administration is going to be a long project with periodic slippage. We are slowly getting traction with the GOA. CFC-A and the Embassy are determined at the highest levels to keep after this until we succeed.
END COMMENT

¶14. (U) Tarin Kowt PRT Commander has reviewed this report.
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